

'Rivulets of Opposition Merge': Perspectives of Anti-Capitalism

Gareth Dale

Naomi Klein, *No Logo*, (London: Harper Collins, 2000, 490 pp., £8.99 pbk.)

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Emma Bircham and John Charlton (eds), *Anti-capitalism: A Guide to the Movement*, (London: Bookmarks, 2001, 401 pp., £10.00 pbk.)

Roger Burbach, *Globalization and Postmodern Politics: From Zapatistas to High-Tech Robber Barons*, (London: Pluto, 2001, 176 pp., (insert price) pbk.)

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'There has not been such a resurgence of activist energy since the Vietnam War', Susan George claimed recently.¹ Wherever the elites of global capitalism meet, under the auspices of the WTO, World Bank, IMF, Free Trade Agreement of the Americas or the EU, so too do protestors, in their tens of thousands. The individuals and ideas at these events are also found in a multitude of smaller-scale campaigns against particular corporate and state policies, as well as at events such as Critical Mass bike rides. The past two years have seen numerous high profile protests in such places as Seattle, Prague, Washington, Quebec, Nice, Gothenburg and Genoa. But what is the nature of this movement? Is it opposed to corporations, to neoliberalism, to globalisation, to capitalism, or indeed to all of these? Is it sufficiently cohesive to bear description in the

1 Quoted in Callinicos, 'The Future', in Bircham/Charlton, *Anti-capitalism*, 387.

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singular? The authors reviewed here are all activists linked to this movement; they are spokespeople as well as theoreticians. Each book develops a critique of the global institutions of power and charts a protest agenda. Naomi Klein, for example, presents hers as

an attempt to analyze and document the forces opposing corporate rule, and to lay out the particular set of cultural and economic conditions that made the emergence of that opposition inevitable.²

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An epoch of crisis and conflict

Before analysing the 'opposition', let us turn to the 'set of conditions'. These are discussed in all three works under the sign of neoliberalism. It was '[t]he dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet in Chile', Roger Burbach writes, that

served as the first laboratory for an experiment in neo-liberal economics in the mid- and late 1970s with its bloody repression of the working class, privatization of state companies, and dismantling of the public health system.³

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Neo-liberal strategies entailing economic deregulation combined with attacks on welfare and on workers' rights and organisation in countries such as Chile, Britain and Canada in the mid-1970s became internationally hegemonic following Washington's conversion to full-blown neoliberalism under Ronald Reagan and Paul Volcker. By the late 1990s the model had consolidated worldwide, with elites everywhere declaring the sanctity of the market.

² Klein p. xxi.

³ Globalization and Postmodern Politics, 42.

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For all its success in convincing elites, the model is failing society. Neo-liberal globalisation has not ushered in an epoch of peace and prosperity. As Lindsey German points out, '[t]here are more wars and they are more likely to involve civilians as casualties than at any time in human history'.⁴ For Burbach, this is 'an epoch of extraordinary conflict, upheaval and uncertainty', as manifested for example in frequent economic crises and financial turbulence.⁵ Indeed, it is in part the absence of steady or rapid global growth that explains the prevalence of 'conflict and upheaval'. Between the 1940s and the 1970s, per capita GDP growth rates, according to Susan George 'were about twice as high as in the more recent neo-liberal, transnational-corporation-dominated era which began at the end of the 1970s'.⁶ Low average growth rates, moreover, conceal striking disparities. Parts of the Third World and the former Soviet Bloc have suffered especially – and some of the sharpest commentary in *Anti-capitalism* is reserved for western apologists for the depression conditions afflicting these regions. Thus Mike Haynes quotes from a book, with the sanguine title *The Coming Russian Boom*, which reassures its readers that life in Russia, economic and social catastrophe notwithstanding, 'continues with dignity in most cases, and the average young woman is more attractively dressed than in Britain or America (and more beautiful)'.⁷ Insights such as this

4 'War', in *Anti-capitalism*, 129.

5 *Globalization and Postmodern Politics*, 38.

6 'Corporate Globalisation', in *Anti-capitalism*, 20.

7 'Russia and Eastern Europe', in *ibid.*, 213.

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apparently impressed Tony Blair so much that one of its authors, Richard Layard, was subsequently promoted to a life peerage as a Baron.

Corporate Takeover

Despite economic implosion in much of the world, certain businesses have been doing very well for themselves, notably the major TNCs. Following repeated bursts of 'merger mania', most of the world's one hundred largest economic entities are now firms, not states. The bulk of the world market in many sectors, including oil, pharmaceuticals, the media and IT, is divided amongst a few giants. These use their technological edge but also economic muscle and political influence in the pursuit of market dominance. One crucial means to this end that these books all emphasize is the control over knowledge. Burbach quotes an intellectual property lawyer to the effect that the control of intellectual assets by modern corporations 'makes the monopolies of the nineteenth century robber barons look like penny-ante operations'.⁸ Kevin Watkins reminds us of the contemporary relevance of Adam Smith's warning that '[p]eople of the same trade seldom meet together but the conversation ends in a conspiracy against the public, or in some diversion to raise prices'.⁹ The difference between Smith's time and now is that the 'conspiracy' is championed by organisations of global governance. Referring to the WTO's recent crusade for patent protection, in particular to its adverse effects on the availability of

⁸ *Globalization and Postmodern Politics*, 57.

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generic drugs in Third World countries -and therefore on the 'human right' to affordable healthcare - Watkins suggests that '[i]t is difficult to think of a more successful conspiracy to raise prices than the TRIPs [Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights] agreement, or of a more abject failure on the part of Northern governments to defend public interest'. [this is continuation from previous

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footnoted quote so doesn't need repeat footnote] This example captures the essence of the analysis of all three books. Private corporate interests increasingly dominate political entities, including states and global institutions. The public interest and democracy itself are undermined, for corporations, 'unlike governments', as Klein reminds us, 'are accountable only to their shareholders'.¹⁰

It is the cultural consequences of the corporate takeover of the public sphere that is the leitmotif of Klein's wide-ranging book. *No logo* depicts a brand-obsessed consumer culture. In some respects it is an activist's redescription of the world of *American Psycho*, or an empirical fleshing out of Debord's *Society of the Spectacle*. Blanket advertising and corporate sponsorship, Klein contends, have comprehensively re-engineered public space. She presents a wealth of evidence - such as schoolchildren designing Nike adverts, or universities colluding with corporations to suppress uncomfortable research findings - to depict a culture colonised by corporate interests and the 'mall mentality'. Like cattle, we are branded - except that we humans seem to savour

9 'Pharmaceutical Patents', in *Anti-capitalism*, 94.

10 *No Logo*, xxi.

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the experience, jumping on brandwagons in the belief that they are vehicles for individuality. Eluding the force of brand marketing is nearly impossible. Not even the fashions and messages of the anti-capitalist movement are immune to appropriation by firms such as Nike, Gap or Apple. Cultural diversity itself has been packaged, and pitched as a universal brand to the global market by corporations that seek to benefit from 'one size fits all' scale economies whilst ducking accusations of 'Coca-Colonisation'.

The gleaming world of brands, as Klein goes on to show, is produced in far from gleaming conditions. In the wake of employers' offensives against union organisation, and with the rise of temporary work as well as outsourcing to sweatshops and non-unionised, unregulated export-processing zones, poverty and insecurity have been on the rise. These issues of poverty and inequality, of private greed trumping public need, are at the heart of the other books, too. 'While the new robber barons have accumulated enormous fortunes', Burbach claims 'workers have reaped few of the benefits'.¹¹ Groups such as women and blacks, we learn, have been affected especially adversely by labour 'flexibilisation' and welfare cuts.¹² And yet the incomes of the upper echelons continue to soar. Susan George informs us, that 'eighty-five percent of the world's population now live in countries where inequalities are growing'.¹³ Polarisation, in other words, is not only a matter of the widening 'North-South gap'. As Burbach sees it,

11 *Globalization and Postmodern Politics*, 54.

12 For example see, 'Women', *Anti-capitalism*, 81-93.

13 'Corporate Globalisation', in *ibid.*, 19.

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[t]he concepts of core and periphery, or North and South, are increasingly not geographic *per se* as much as they are social class in character.¹⁴

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From ATTAC to Z-Magazine

These are some of the chief concerns that exercise the writers reviewed here and the movement itself. But how should the movement be conceived? How has it developed? What are its characteristics? In addressing such questions the most striking thing to note, and something that comes through in the books reviewed here, is the degree of optimism, even exuberance, felt by participants. Such a mood is common in the early stages of rising movements, as is a strong sense of unity. Klein gives a good impression of the origins of this optimism by including anecdotes from her own political journey. This began in the Canadian campus politics of the late 1980s, which 'was all about issues of discrimination and identity - race, gender and sexuality'.¹⁵ Without implying that equal representation was not worth fighting for, Klein does suggest that such 'political correctness wars' dealt only pinpricks so long as no attempt was made to connect them to wider struggles against corporate power and commodification. 'We were too busy analyzing the pictures being projected on the wall', she writes 'to notice that the wall itself had been sold'.¹⁶ 'Identity' in effect quashed 'politics'; the movement 'became so consumed by personal

14 *Globalization and Postmodern Politics*, 39.

15 *No Logo*, xix.

16 *Ibid.*, 124.

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politics that they all but eclipsed the rest of the world. The slogan “the personal is political” came to replace the economic as political and, in the end, the Political as political as well’.¹⁷

This constrained agenda doubtless reflected the fact that social movements throughout much of the world had endured a long period of malaise; activists’ heads were down. In the greater scheme of things this is no novelty. Great, world-shaking movements come in waves – examples include the late eighteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries, 1918-27, 1945-8, and 1968-74. The current movement, as yet significantly smaller than those mentioned, is commonly dated from the Zapatista rising of 1994, with the Battle of Seattle as its ‘coming-out party’. As it grew, according to Klein, activists’ concerns ‘broaden[ed] out to include corporate power, labor rights, and a fairly developed analysis of the workings of the global economy’.¹⁸ All three books reviewed here testify to how, in the current period, numerous separate movements ripple outwards and inter-connect, giving rise to an unprecedented sense of global reach and political breadth. *Anti-capitalism* is in its very architecture an indication of this. Its thirty-two contributors hail from a range of groups, from ATTAC to Z-magazine via Friends of the Earth, Globalise Resistance, Jubilee Plus, Oxfam, Socialist Workers Party and the World Development Movement. ‘I don’t think I have ever come across a book which contains so many different viewpoints, and yet such a unity of purpose’.

17 Ibid., 109.

18 Ibid., xix.

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remarks George Monbiot in his introduction.¹⁹ Indeed, conspicuous diversity is here, paradoxically, a sign of unity. Imagine if, a generation ago, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, Solidarność, the Sandinistas, the Kwangju uprising and the German Greens had all been widely perceived as belonging to a single movement family. Talk of diversity would have been ubiquitous but precisely as a tribute to a remarkable unity.

Why Now?

Accounting for the growth and decline of movements is necessarily difficult, given the complex layers of factors, economic, political and psychological, involved. Klein's account emphasizes two parallel objective processes. The first is the saturation branding of public space. The second is the replacement of stable and well-remunerated jobs by 'McJobs'. If the first leads to 'brand overload' and, in turn, anti-corporate resentment, the second undermines the loyalty of workers, especially temporary workers, to the corporations that employ them. The casualisation of work, Klein contends, 'is the single most significant factor contributing to a climate of anti-corporate militancy'.²⁰ Combined with a steady trickle of reports on corporate abuses, these twin processes facilitated an emergent unity between widening layers of the working class and 'new' social movements (the famous 'Teamster-turtle' partnership) and pointed ultimately towards widespread anti-corporate militancy.

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¹⁹ *Anti-capitalism*, 6.

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The problem for this type of argument is that trends towards labour casualisation and corporate branding have been going strong since the early 1980s, if not before. Klein herself notes that ‘in the late seventies, as the *loglo* grew brighter, social-justice activism faded’.²¹ The colonisation of public space and the exploitation of labour *always* breed localised resentment and resistance, but these, though clearly necessary, are not sufficient conditions for the emergence of broad social movements. In which case, what does then explain the movement’s emergence? A number of factors appear in these books, although they are nowhere assembled into a systematic explanation. To begin with, Colin Barker suggests that the ending of the worst period of defeats for workers’ movements in many parts of the world, and their buoyancy in countries such as France, has boosted social movements in general. ‘We have been through a terrible trough’, he avers, ‘and it takes a new generation to lift its head and shake off past defeats’.²² As wearier veterans retreat to their armchairs, a more spirited generation – young and old – may be taking their place. Crucial, in this context, has been the emergence of a number of major campaigns such as Students Against Sweatshops and Jubilee 2000. This growth can, to a degree, be self-perpetuating. To borrow a metaphor from Chris Nineham, ‘as the tide of the movement rises, the rivulets of opposition tend to merge’.²³ This merging occurs most visibly at the large demonstrations

²⁰ *No Logo*, 266.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 349.

²² ‘Socialists’, in *Anti-capitalism*, 334.

²³ ‘An Idea Whose Time Has Come’, *International Socialism* no. 91, 2001, 23.

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themselves. Such events tend to bring into the open solidarities that have been maturing over years. Mark O'Brien points out that '[a]t Seattle trade unionists were not marching alongside environmentalists as strangers - many were already acquainted'.²⁴ When relatively localised or issue-based movements come together on urban streets a metamorphosis can occur. As John Charlton explains, the demonstration is a highly inclusive form of protest - it does not require great sacrifices of energy or time nor is the likelihood of arrest high - and can therefore attract large numbers. Given a mass presence

the boundaries between different types of campaigns tend to dissolve in the crowd. Even where protesters arrive in separate contingents the very act of meeting with others and sharing a target produces an interaction across those boundaries. This process is sharply accelerated where the police intervene.²⁵

A second major factor facilitating unity (and therefore strength) 'below' is, paradoxically, the sheer success of the neo-liberal model in establishing a consensus 'above', amongst the world's elites. 'The powerful in the world - in government, politics, the media and business', Vandana Shiva has written, 'are emerging as a global alliance, transcending North-South divides'.²⁶ And with social democratic and ex-Communist parties bleaching into a uniform neoliberalism, the evacuation of alternatives from the official sphere encourages critique to seek extra-parliamentary venues. Thus, Naomi Klein voices the exasperation of those who

24 'Labour', in *Anti-capitalism*, 74.

25 'Events', in *ibid.*, 345. These words were written before the recent shooting by police of a demonstrator in Genoa.

26 Quoted by Chris Harman, 'Anti-capitalism: Theory and Practice', *International Socialism*, no. 88, 2000, 37.

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have tried to reverse conservative economic trends by electing liberal, labor or democratic-socialist governments, only to find that economic policy remains unchanged or caters even more directly to the whims of global corporations.²⁷

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On a similar note, Adrian Budd suggests that economic globalisation and hegemonic neoliberalism have blurred the boundaries that once kept 'national capitalist models' - including Second and Third World state capitalisms - relatively distinct. The emergence of a clearer structure of power at the global level, he argues, encourages 'activists to lift their gaze from national reform to global change'.²⁸ This aspect of globalisation, combined with the communications revolution, is conducive to the rise of global-oriented protest activities. Although all such processes are heavily weighted towards the OECD and Newly Industrialising Countries, there is yet a vital element of truth in the contention that economic internationalisation is paving the way to a global public sphere. 'A world united by Benetton slogans, Nike sweatshops and McDonald's jobs might not be anyone's utopian global village', as Klein puts it, 'but its fibre-optic cables and shared cultural references are nonetheless laying the foundations for the first truly international people's movement'.²⁹ This, incidentally, explains why much of the movement resists the label 'anti-globalisation'. When it began to take shape in the mid-nineties, Klein recalls,

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it seemed to be a collection of protectionists getting together out of necessity to fight everything and anything global. But as connections

²⁷ *No Logo*, 341.

²⁸ 'Western Europe', in *Anti-capitalism*, 174.

²⁹ *No Logo*, 357.

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have formed across national lines, a different agenda has taken hold, one that embraces globalisation but seeks to wrest it from the grasp of the multinationals.³⁰

A third essential factor, according to Charlton, 'is the impetus given to the movement by victory'. Successes noted in *Anti-capitalism* include the shelving of the Multilateral Agreement on Investment and, in some places, of 'terminator' seeds; the halting of the privatisation of the Bolivian water industry; the withdrawal of genetically modified products from many supermarkets and restaurants (and even from the canteen at Monsanto's UK headquarters!); the collapse of WTO negotiations at Seattle - with protests contributing to the resolution of Third World delegates inside - and the forced truncation and/or abandonment of various meetings of the World Bank and IMF. 'Significant though these achievements have been', writes Alex Callinicos, 'the greatest impact of the movement has been symbolic and ideological'.³¹ To illustrate this point Callinicos gives quotations from George Soros: 'This protest movement is plugging into something that is widely felt. The methods they employ are not acceptable but they are effective' - and from *Business Week*:

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It would be a great mistake to dismiss the uproar witnessed in the past few years in Seattle, Washington DC, and Prague. Many of the radicals leading the protests may be on the political fringe. But they have helped to kick-start a profound rethinking about globalisation among governments, mainstream economists, and corporations.³²

³⁰ Ibid., 445.

³¹ 'The Future', *Anti-capitalism*, 388.

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On this side of the Atlantic the Financial Times recently devoted a series of articles to the anti-capitalist movement, while The Economist produced an issue entitled 'Pro Logo: Why brands are good for you'.³³

However, if the movement has succeeded in disrupting the business of elite globalisers and forced them to take measures to evade and co-opt protest, it has also, more importantly, 'caught the imagination of millions', in the words of Kim Moody of *Labor Notes*, 'and moved the consequences and methods of capitalist globalisation way up the agenda of social movements - including organised labour - the world around'.³⁴ In this sense, although the strength of the movement does not (as yet) bear comparison with those of the late 1960s, it already packs an anti-systemic punch. In John Pilger's words, it

represents probably the greatest single movement against the system since the Second World War. It has actually taken on capitalism, and although that happened in the 1960s to some degree, I don't think this has ever happened to such an integrated extent throughout the world'.³⁵

Between Flea Markets and Global New Deal

Reading these texts does indeed give an impression of an 'integrated' movement. It is opposed to the commodification of ever-further reaches of human life; to the plunder of 'natural capital' and the imperilling of planet

³² Ibid., 390.

³³ Interest in the movement, however, has so far largely failed to penetrate the academy.

³⁴ 'Unions', in *Anti-capitalism*, 292.

Earth as a future habitat; to exploitation and 'social exclusion'; and to the 'corporate takeover' of public space and the political process. Neoliberalism is not the *ne plus ultra* of human existence, these authors sing in chorus, 'another world is possible'. This tone, bold and straightforward, is best captured in Barry Coates's interrogation of the General Agreement on Trade in Services negotiations:

Why should the aim of international rules on services be to remove any barriers to foreign corporations? Why shouldn't the objectives be to promote universal access to basic services? Or ecologically sound development?³⁶

If there is one single positive project that unites these voices, it is to encourage the self-assertion of individuals defending their conditions of life and work. Ultimately the common project – whether defined in anarchist, socialist, or radical liberal terms – is participatory democracy. As Burbach puts it, 'What these various movements have in common is the goal of expanding the practice of democracy to include the economic realm. They hearken back to the Greek origins of the word: rule of the people'.³⁷

Drawing attention to these areas of common ground should not, however, deflect from the many serious differences over itinerary, strategy and agency. Debates rage over the stance to take towards globalisation, 'localisation' and protectionism; on whether the aim is to 'fix or nix' the WTO and IMF; on

³⁵ 'Resistance is Winning', *Socialist Review*, no. 254, 2001, p.14.

³⁶ GATS, in *Anti-capitalism*,³⁷

³⁷ *Globalization and Postmodern Politics*,¹⁰¹.

whether Third World countries should prioritise 'development' or traditional agriculture; not to mention the familiar debate over reform vs. revolution. For many of the authors represented here the march route is towards what Klein – drawing an explicit parallel with the 1930s – calls a 'global New Deal'. In similar vein Ann Pettifor calls 'for a return to discipline, order and regulation in the international financial system'.³⁸ It must be said, however, that the demands of all of these spokespeople, albeit frequently phrased in terms of regulation, are to Roosevelt's New Deal as a lion to a fireside mog. Susan George, for example, advocates: a strengthening of international law and of the regulation of business; the Tobin Tax; the closure of all tax havens, fair trade, and the cancellation of Third World debt; and to make corporations both financially and legally responsible for all their actions, that is, for the actions of their subsidiaries'. 'This', she promises, 'is only for starters'.³⁹

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The great question is, of course, where the lion could get its claws. All of these authors look first to the movement itself, as an already-moving cog that can turn other forces into action. All welcome a range of activities but prioritise different strategies. Burbach's is – despite his claim to be 'constructing *entirely new* radical narratives',⁴⁰ – strongly reminiscent of Proudhon's aim of marrying market competition to communitarian rules of exchange and ownership. His proposal for an 'alternative economy', for example, reads like a manifesto for co-operative enterprise and small business, with its recommendation that small

³⁸ 'Debt', in *Anti-capitalism*, 52.

³⁹ 'Corporate Globalisation', in *ibid.*, 22.

⁴⁰ *Globalization and Postmodern Politics*, 106.

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firms use the internet 'to take control of the marketing and distribution of their products', and its advocacy of small-scale agricultural enterprises, municipally-owned businesses, workers' co-operatives, employee share-ownership schemes, fair trade, socially responsible investment, microcredit banks, as well as land reform.⁴¹ A little later he gives examples of the 'alternative, postmodern economy' in Latin American cities:

These are all nascent, alternative economic activities', he opines, without a hint of irony, 'because they represent efforts by people to take control of their lives at the most fundamental, grassroots level.⁴²

For Susan George, the emphasis is upon the prospect of social movements and NGOs catalysing a broader 'citizens movement' that will concentrate the forces of 'civil society' and win reforms from corporations and governments.⁴³ Klein's approach is similar, although she devotes most of her attention to the 'culture-jamming' and 'hacktivism' of brand-aware and 'techno-savvy' young people. She is, in this respect, no Ken Loach, although at one point she does quote a group of Phillippino workers from the Cavite export-processing zone who, after listening to her 'logo-centric' take on politics and protest, told her they had never really thought about it like that; 'politics in Cavite is about fighting for concrete improvements in workers' lives – not about what name happens to be on a T-shirt you happen to have on your back'.⁴⁴

41 Ibid., 93–6.

42 Ibid., 112.

43 'Corporate Globalisation', in *Anti-capitalism*, 21.

44 *No Logo*, 429.

Another Cavite-dweller, in a critique of 'Westerners swooping into the zone brandishing codes of conduct' for improving shop-floor conditions, is quoted as saying '[t]he more significant way to resolve these problems lies with the workers themselves, inside the factory'.⁴⁵

Combating a 'Mad Monster'

If this last argument is, in *No logo*, spoken only through the voices of others, it is at the heart of perhaps half of the contributions to *Anti-Capitalism*. As the book's title indicates, its contributors submit that the movement, commonly named 'anti-corporate' or 'anti-globalisation', should not restrict its opposition to brand corporations or to other major power centres such as the institutions of 'global governance', but should oppose capitalism *tout court*. The obvious difficulty with this project, as Barker points out, is that the capitalist system

is vast, intricate, global. It confronts its opponents like some mad monster, which can regrow its limbs when it is attacked. We have to confront it as a whole. Fighting it thus poses a profound problem. Where can we find a force capable of going beyond making mere moral protests at some of its worst features?⁴⁶

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The classical Marxist response to this is, in the words of Emma Bircham, that 'it is in the essence of capitalism that *their* power is already *ours*'.⁴⁷ Workers - defined broadly to include shop assistants, computer technicians, teachers, nurses, bank workers and the like - 'are the ones that create [the] wealth'.

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⁴⁵ Ibid., 440.

⁴⁶ 'Socialists', in *Anti-capitalism*, 330.

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Admittedly, Barker notes, workers' organisations are, in many places, only 'just coming out of a period of huge knock-backs'. However, he insists, workers' movements come in waves and will in all likelihood rise again. The hope here, therefore, is that the 'spirit of Seattle' will filter into myriad workplace and community struggles, resulting in a synergy of anti-capitalist and workers' movements. Kim Moody puts the case in the following form:

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the great need is to pull these two forces together: the mobility and audacity of the movement in the streets with the social weight and numbers of the organised working class. "Teamsters and Turtles, together at last," was the slogan that celebrated that momentary unity in the streets of Seattle and projected such an alliance as the future of the global justice movement.⁴⁸

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If this socialist strategy is in the long run predicated on the development of mass struggles against exploitation and oppression, its proponents also warn against the lures of two 'short-cut' alternatives. One is to look no further than the small forces of the movement itself. 'To rely always on a militant minority is a form of unconscious elitism, born of impatience', Barker cautions. 'Putting a brick through the window of Starbucks', he elaborates, 'is a moral gesture, but an ineffective one. Organising Starbucks workers is harder, but more effective - and hurts the Starbucks bosses more'.⁴⁹ The other is to succumb to co-optation by corporate and governmental bodies. Callinicos warns activists to beware the

47 'Foreword', in *ibid.*, 2.

48 'Unions', in *ibid.*, 293.

49 'Socialists', in *ibid.*, 333.

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siren calls for 'dialogue' from global institutions and TNCs. By way of example

he cites the chief executive of BP who wrote recently that:

Business cannot fall into the trap of seeing NGOs as automatic enemies. In the long run, companies and NGOs are both agents of change. Our goal must be to put the two together'.⁵⁰

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Callinicos counsels that such responses, along with initiatives such as the UN's

'Global Compact',

reflect an understanding on our rulers' part that the anti-capitalist movement is a diverse one as well as the hope that they can exploit this by encouraging internecine conflict, incorporating the moderates, and isolating the more militant elements.⁵¹

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Diversity, he concludes, though natural and, on the whole, 'a source of strength', also provides fracture points for strategies of 'divide and rule'.

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Postmodern Anti-capitalism

A rather different angle on questions of diversity and fragmentation is to be found in Roger Burbach's monograph. For him, the movement is understood as manifesting a 'new politics' for a fractured, postmodern age. This thesis is developed along three main lines. First, this is an epoch in which national states are becoming increasingly subservient to 'footloose and entirely deterritorialized finance capitalists and transnational corporations'.⁵² Given the reduced power of states, he reasons, 'it may be more effective to wage an

⁵⁰ 'The Future', in *ibid.*, 391.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 391.

⁵² *Globalization and Postmodern Politics*, 49.

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ongoing struggle for change from below rather than holding formal power'.⁵³ The paradigm here is the Zapatista rebellion. Because the Zapatistas did not seek power but merely 'to spark a broadly-based movement of civil society' they may be regarded as 'the first postmodern revolutionary movement'.⁵⁴ However, how this aim is so radically different to that of the Zapatistas' namesake, to mention but one 'modern' movement of 'civil society', is not made clear. Second, he argues that 'traditional class society' is fragmenting, giving way to entirely new strata: 'newly affluent employees and professionals' and, on lower rungs, a proliferation of 'segmented identities and localized groups, typically based on ethnic or sexual difference'.⁵⁴ This social disarticulation is reflected in 'political fragmentation', notably the decline of 'class politics based on trade unions and a numerous industrial working class' and 'the rise of single-issue politics that appeal to the new social strata'.⁵⁵ Burbach draws extensively upon the 'new social movement' paradigm developed in the 1980s. This refers to a set of theories which predicted a waning of broad-based, anti-systemic, 'materialist' movements, and their replacement by both particularistic, single-issue movements oriented to 'life-political' issues (such as the environment and human rights) and 'symbolic' questions of identity representation.⁵⁶ In parallel with the fragmentation of social movements,

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⁵³ Ibid., 79.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 72.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 73.

⁵⁶ Cf. Gareth Dale and Colin Barker, 'A Critique of "New Social Movement" Theory', *Critical Sociology*, 25 (1-2) 1998: 64-105.

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Burbach, in a poststructuralist vein, posits the demise of 'metanarratives', those theoretical frameworks that give coherence to practices of oppression.

There are, however, ambivalences in Burbach's position. He is sensitive to the challenge that metanarratives may also lend coherence to practices of resistance, and that the deconstruction of reason's foundations may point towards 'complete relativism, nihilism and a belief that political and social struggles are meaningless'.⁵⁷ He feels obliged to concede that capitalism is itself a 'metanarrative', and is, moreover, becoming a 'universal system'. And he admits that 'some universals, like universal human rights, are necessary'.⁵⁸ These ambivalences are explicable, in part at least, by the fact that the movements described in these books, by intertwining themes of 'life politics' with 'old' 'materialist' issues of working conditions and job security, undermine the assumptions of new social movement theory. They are not, in general, a mere assortment of disparate 'new social movements' but a network of campaigns, individuals, and parties which are, despite a multitude of differences, 'informed by a sense of totality', the belief that fault lies with 'the system itself rather than some specific aspect or institution'.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ *Globalization and Postmodern Politics*, 76. An example of this is given by Klein in her side-swipe at 1980s campus 'politics', where 'more than a few of those tenured radicals who were supposed to be corrupting young minds with socialist ideas were preoccupied with their own postmodernist realization that truth itself is a construct. This realization made it intellectually untenable for many academics to even participate in a political argument that would have "privileged" any one model of learning (public) over another (corporate)'. *No Logo*, 341.

⁵⁸ *Globalization and Postmodern Politics*, 76

⁵⁹ Alex Callinicos, 'The Future', in *Anti-capitalism*, 388.

September 11th

Writing in the immediate aftermath of the September 11th carnage in the USA it is clear that this movement, as all aspects of global politics, will be affected. Already some commentators, seeking to conflate the World Trade Organisation with the World Trade Centre, and US citizens with US policy, have accused the anti-capitalist movement of complicity with the hijackers. Thus the International Herald Tribune (September 13th, p.2), after suggesting that the attacks were 'likely to remove much of the hysteria surrounding the globalization of world financial markets and commerce', went on to call for stepped up repression of protests against 'globalisation' and American foreign policy:

The horror of hijacked passenger jets crashing into the symbol that was the World Trade Centre underscored the absurdity of the misplaced violence against globalization, and strengthened the hand of authorities dealing with it. Demonizing the USA and world trade organizations in a violent context suddenly has the contours of a possibly murderous enterprise.

In the face of strident conservatism of this sort, not to mention resurgent chauvinism and jingoism, some campaign groups have chosen to lay low. Leaders of the Sierra Club, America's oldest green group, instructed staff to 'stop aggressively pushing our agenda and [to] cease bashing President Bush'.⁶⁰ The Ruckus Society, a prominent direct action training group,

⁶⁰ www.counterpunch.org

cancelled its training camp. And the Mobilization for Global Justice umbrella organisation withdrew its call to demonstrate at the IMF meeting scheduled for Washington in late September, even before the event was cancelled by the IMF itself.

Others hold that a better tribute to the dead lies in redoubled efforts to oppose the dynamics of imperialism and economic polarisation which provide recruiting grounds for vengeful killers. Challenging the prevailing assumption that terrorism is best fought with guns and identity cards, they argue that in the violence of the barbarian 'Outside', to borrow Slavoj Žižek's phrase, the West should 'recognize the distilled version of [its] own essence.'⁶¹ More bluntly, Naomi Klein asks, 'Did U.S. foreign policy create the conditions in which such twisted logic could flourish?'⁶² Because so many arguments along these lines have appeared already in newsprint and on the internet, I shall limit this brief survey to comments by four of the authors discussed above.

For Naomi Klein, the atrocities demand a reappraisal of the media representation of war. Wars elsewhere in the world, typically emanating from the Pentagon or using American arms, are sanitized for domestic TV consumption, she argues, leading many to believe in 'the ultimate oxymoron: a safe war.' Thus, she continues,

After the [USA's] 1998 bombing of a pharmaceutical factory in Sudan

⁶¹ 'Welcome to the Desert of the Real', unpublished paper.

⁶² 'War Isn't A Game After All', *The Globe & Mail*, 14.9.01.

there weren't too many follow-up reports about what the loss of vaccine manufacturing did to disease prevention in the region. And when NATO bombed civilian targets in Yugoslavia, NBC didn't do "streeter" interviews with survivors about how shocked they were by the indiscriminate destruction.

It may be the experience of mass slaughter on their doorstep, she concludes, rather too hopefully perhaps, that awakens Americans to the bitter truth that 'war isn't a game after all'.

Roger Burbach, currently writing a book on the terrorism of Pinochet's regime, notes the uncanny coincidence that September 11th also marks an equally bloody event: the coup that overthrew the government of Salvador Allende. Far from being simply a random coincidence, there are, he argues, links between the two evils. It is, Burbach suggests, widely known that the CIA backed Pinochet's coup and went on to either knowingly ignore or actively abet 'Operation Condor', the Chilean and allied Latin American regimes' terrorist strikes against political opponents across the Americas. 'The CIA appears to have concluded that Condor was a rogue operation and may have tried to contain its activities', Burbach writes. But far from rethinking its attitude to such 'rogue operations' the US government went into a recidivist rut, sponsoring and arming a series of 'rogues' including General Noriega, Saddam Hussein, and one suspect accused of masterminding the recent atrocities, Osama Bin Laden. 'Unless we acknowledge that the U.S. government has been intricately involved in the creation of international terrorist networks and abandon that practice once and for all', Burbach warns, 'the cycle of violence and terrorism will only deepen in the months and years to come.'

In similar vein, Alex Callinicos fears that Bush's 'crusade' against targets in the Middle East, far from forging a global alliance against 'Islamic terrorism', will only 'widen the faultlines within the international system and make the world a more dangerous and unstable place'.⁶³ George Monbiot agrees, citing in addition recent commitments by Bush and Blair to beef up the power of the arms industry, to 'launch campaigns of the kind which inevitably kill civilians,' and to loosen restrictions on the intelligence agencies. In the face of this bullish right-wing agenda, defenders of civil liberties and opponents of racism and corporate power are currently on the defensive but 'dissent', Monbiot insists, 'is most necessary just when it is hardest to voice.'⁶⁴

The confidence with which these authors assert that the terrorist 'Other' reflects to the West its own barbarism, together with the peace vigils and anti-war protests occurring already in New York, London and elsewhere, suggests, as a tentative conclusion, that most sections of the anti-capitalist movement will get back to 'business as usual'. However, only a week after a tragedy of this scale, with the world still reeling, there would be little point in making firmer predictions as to whether anti-capitalist protest will weaken or strengthen as a result.

⁶³ 'An Uneasy Alliance', *Socialist Worker*, 22.9.01.

⁶⁴ 'The Need for Dissent', *The Guardian*, 18.9.01.